**RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR CRITICS**

Sunday School Lesson 18

*Building Right Relationships*

Matthew 5:11

7/9/2023

**Introduction:** Last week, we took a second week to look at our relationship with critics. In that lesson, we focused on five motivations that often lead a critic to ungodly criticism. The first motivation is the behavioral and emotional control that the critics can gain over the person who they are criticizing. We must be careful not to give an ungodly critic control over us, as our desire must be to please God over man. The second motivation is the opportunity that the criticism gives the critic to vocalize their general discontentment with life, that person, or a given situation. The critic feels a sense of fleshly satisfaction from voicing the negatives about a person and potentially causing that person to join in their personal misery. The third motivation is that criticism allows the ungodly critic to deflect from his own failures and worthiness of criticism. If the critic can criticize someone else first or louder, then there’s less attention placed on their own behavior. The fourth motivation is a simple yet common one – attention seeking. People often give way too much attention to a critic. We noted last week that criticism insinuates that the critic knows what he is talking about. It’s done from a position of superior knowledge or behavior. As a result of this, the critic knows that his criticism will give him attention and even respect from others. Today, we are going to take a final look at the relationship with critics by observing an array of Biblical principles that we can apply.

1. **A CHURCH MEMBER WITH AN UNGODLY, CRITICAL SPIRIT HAS TO BE DEALT WITH.**

* 1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 1 Corinthians 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (Rom. 14:10; Philippians 1:27; Prov. 22:10) The Scriptures are clear about the need for harmony in the church. This is not just harmony in action but harmony in spirit as well. An ungodly, critical spirit in the church can be a cancer that infects every area of the church. As we saw last week, ungodly criticism is based in the motivations of our carnal flesh. A person living in such a way is living just as sinful as the one who is engaged in some type of sin of the flesh that we all would agree is wicked and harmful. For this reason, Christians have to be willing to confront such behavior and mark those who refuse to repent of their critical spirit.

1. **WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO MARK A CRITICAL SPIRIT BASED ON OUR OWN HURT.**

* Hebrews 12:15 looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Unjust criticism can be especially painful. As we mentioned last week, ungodly critics like the emotional control they often gain over the criticized. This then leads people to be extra sensitive to all criticism. Their hurt and bitterness over previous wrongs that came from criticism causes them to label all criticism as wrong and unnecessary. Sadly, this ends in a vicious cycle of the hurt individual becoming the one with an ungodly, critical spirit. They’ll claim that anybody who reproves them or speaks the Truth has a critical spirit, and they’ll often make it their mission to criticize such a person. Unfortunately, the pharisaical nature of their own behavior is often lost on them. Additionally, even when we receive harsh criticism, we must not let the hurt of that criticism cause us to mark the person giving it. A critical person is not just one who gives harsh critique.

1. **WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO MARK A CRITICAL SPIRIT BASED ON MOTIVES.**

* Jeremiah 17:10 I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. After last week’s lesson, we might be inclined to mark someone with a critical spirit based on what we see as their perceived motivations. We should be careful not to put ourselves in the Lord’s position as the One Who sees the heart of man. The New Testament repeatedly shows us that the fruit will ultimately show the motives of others. Obviously, there are those who play games with God and put on a pretense, but we must be careful not to make unjust assumptions. Use our criticism checker from the first lesson to discern signs of a person having a critical spirit.

1. **TO AVOID AN UNGODLY, CRITICAL SPIRIT, WE MUST BE WILLING TO CRITICIZE.**

* Zechariah 8:16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: 17 and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord. This point may seem contradicting, but carefully consider the truth of it. We know that criticism is necessary. We are called to criticism in the church of any brother who walks disorderly. We are called to speak the truth to one another in the love of God. Therefore, we must be willing to criticize. What happens then if we do not obey the Bible’s command? We shut up that which is good within is, and it consequently leads us to that which is wrong and harmful. We continue to focus on negative that should have been addressed.

1. **TO HAVE PROPER CRITICISM, WE MUST FIRST HAVE PROPER EXPECTATIONS.**

* Luke 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Psalm 62:5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. Criticism comes from our expectations not being met. When we go to offer criticism, we must ask whether our expectations are right. For other believers, our expectations ought to be God’s expectations given from His Word. Additionally, we must consider whether we are putting too much trust in a person which is causing us to be especially critical of them. Ultimately, our expectation must be in the Lord.

1. **TO HAVE PROPER CRITICISM, WE MUST SPEAK WITH THE LAW OF LIBERTY IN MIND.**

* James 2:12-13 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty 13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. This thought is connected with the above and with a previous thought about criticism being based on personal opinions instead of Biblical truth. When we speak, we ought to consider that we will be judged by the law of liberty. Does our criticism of others pass this test? Are we thoughtful of whether we have Scriptural grounds to offer up such rebuke of another brother or sister in Christ? Perhaps, we have an expectation for a Christian that we do not even have for ourselves. We speak with **our** judgment in mind.

1. **UNGODLY CRITICISM FAILS TO PROPERLY ADDRESS THE PERSON BEING CRITICIZED.**

* Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Psalm 101:5 Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. (Prov. 19:25) The Bible warns about the repercussions for the person who is unwilling to address criticism toward the person criticized. If you are not willing to confront with that criticism, then it’s very likely that you are seeking to be a tale bearer and a gossip. There may be times where a person criticizes the behavior of another person to a third party with the purpose of edifying that third person to do right and avoid similar behavior, but it’s important for the critic to check Biblical commands and personal motives in it.

1. **TO HAVE PROPER CRITICISM, WE MUST STRIVE TO BE SPECIFIC AND DIRECT.**

* Mark 16:14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. If the purpose of criticism is to be helpful, then we must consider whether it is helpful to give criticism that is lacking in its specificity and directness. What good is the criticism if the person is left to wonder what you really meant by what was said? Did Christ speak in generalities when it came to criticizing His disciples or the religious leaders? No. He told them bluntly that their hearts were hard.

1. **TO HAVE PROPER CRITICISM, WE MUST DIRECT IT TOWARD ACTIONABLE ISSUES.**

* John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. The disciples wanted to criticize the blind man over something that he had no power over. Jesus showed them that this thing had been done to manifest the works of God. We must be careful to avoid criticism over things that are without any action associated with them. This is particularly useful when considering criticism over past events. If nothing can be done now, what is the purpose?